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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

30 May 1980

MEMORANDUMCHANCELLOR SCHMIDT'S VISIT TO MOSCOW []

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Summary

Chancellor Schmidt views his proposed visit to Moscow on 30 June with mixed motives that, in summary, make it appear an unavoidable ordeal. Given Schmidt's already established image as the peace candidate in the West German electoral contest, the trip has become almost essential to his campaign. Yet it offers more risks than opportunities, since his conservative opponent, Franz Josef Strauss, is prepared to exploit any misstep by Schmidt. The Soviets have so far not shown any willingness to make substantive concessions to the Bonn government leader, although they regard his visit as a forceful demonstration that, despite their invasion of Afghanistan, the USSR is able to maintain a political dialogue with West Europe. Despite the emphasis both sides place on dialogue and despite the wide range of topics likely to be discussed--arms control, Afghanistan, Iran, inner-German relations--the Soviets are not likely to yield any more in the way of substance to Schmidt than they did to French President Giscard earlier this month. Although Bonn and Moscow are still dickering over dates, the Soviets clearly are eager for the visit to take place. Schmidt would probably be satisfied to return from Moscow with his reputation for statesmanship intact. []

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This memorandum, requested by the National Security Council, was prepared by [] the Western Europe Division and [] the USSR Division, Office of Political Analysis. Research was completed on 30 May. The paper was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for Western Europe and the National Intelligence Officer for the USSR Division. Questions and comments may be addressed to the Chief, Western Europe Division [] and the Chief, USSR Division []

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Diplomatic Gamesmanship

Schmidt decided soon after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to announce publicly his readiness to accept a standing Soviet invitation to Moscow. Domestic political reasons aside, he hoped then to forestall rapid escalation of Soviet-US tensions. One of the precepts of West German foreign policy is that Bonn-Moscow relations can "contribute to stability in Europe" only if the superpowers retain a joint interest in detente. []

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In early April, the Soviets responded by reiterating the invitation. They clearly wanted to preserve the status quo ante Afghanistan in bilateral relations and may have hoped as well to spur movement on bilateral economic relations and perhaps influence Bonn's decision on an Olympic boycott. Nevertheless, Schmidt moved to obtain West German support for the boycott and resisted Soviet pressure to convene the bilateral economic commission in April. (The commission finally met in Bonn yesterday.) []

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We have only sketchy information on the Bonn-Moscow maneuvering over a date for the visit, but Schmidt evidently played hard to get. Meanwhile, he let it be known that the visit would be coordinated with Bonn's allies and, in a May Day speech, Schmidt announced he would tell the Soviets in Moscow to get their troops out of Afghanistan. At this point, he was clearly willing to risk a Soviet decision not to fix a date for the visit; a rule of this game is that he who decides not to meet becomes the foe of detente. []

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Finally--as French President Giscard was meeting Brezhnev in Warsaw on 19 May--Bonn proposed that Schmidt's visit take place on 30 June and 1 July. The Soviets are still mulling over the dates, but they are nevertheless expected to schedule the visit. []

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The Stakes

The Soviets regard Schmidt's visit as a demonstration that, despite their invasion of Afghanistan, the USSR is able to maintain a political dialogue with the West. They also see the visit as an opportunity to further divide Bonn from Washington. The event thus will be accorded full Soviet media treatment and official acclaim as proof that, despite the US, Bonn, like Moscow, wants to lessen international tensions and buttress detente. In addition, West Germany's economic and military weight in Europe and Schmidt's standing in the Alliance make his visit more significant and valuable to the Soviets than Giscard's recent meeting with Brezhnev. Indeed, the Soviets may have agreed to meet with the French in large part to spur Schmidt to come to Moscow. []

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However, it will be awkward for Schmidt, while shooting continues in Afghanistan, to bring off a peacemakers' summit in Moscow--one that appears worthwhile both to West Germans, who in general are highly skeptical of Soviet motives, and to the other Western allies. Although Giscard broke the ice regarding summit meetings with Brezhnev, the disappointing result devalued the argument both Giscard and Schmidt had used about the utility of communication. It is necessary, therefore, for Schmidt to strive for more substance, even though he already knows the meeting with Brezhnev will probably have to be defended against critics as "of value in itself." [REDACTED]

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The Issues

Schmidt will be anxious for a public Soviet statement of support for further cooperation between East and West Germany. This will require bargaining, because Moscow presumably influenced postponement of Schmidt's planned visit to East Germany as well as that regime's threat that sports relations between the two Germanies will suffer because of the Olympic boycott. Without a statement on all-German relations, there may be no communique at the end of Schmidt's visit. [REDACTED]

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Movement toward arms control negotiations on theater nuclear forces is high on Schmidt's agenda. His signal to Moscow, in an April speech, that TNF deployments might be delayed if arms control talks got underway, assures Soviet probing of his intentions, but Schmidt lacks room for maneuver. Soviet unresponsiveness and the negative US reaction to the signal caused him to reaffirm the NATO position. Schmidt could not give even the appearance of altering that stand without handing the opposition a powerful election issue and affronting Foreign Minister Genscher, who will accompany him to Moscow. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets can be expected to intone their familiar litany of alleged US violations of the spirit of detente, in particular Washington's sponsorship of last December's NATO TNF decision. In a effort to further Washington-Bonn differences, Schmidt's hosts will probably also press him to urge the US to ratify SALT II.

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There is no indication at present, however, that the Soviets are prepared to qualify in any meaningful way their demand that the NATO TNF decision be revoked or shelved. In fact, Moscow has reaffirmed its contention that the initiative on arms questions now lies with the West. The Soviet Ambassador to East Germany asserted to the US Ambassador to Berlin this week that 20,000 Soviet troops and 1,000 tanks had already been withdrawn from East Germany by 25 May, more than four months in advance of the deadline Brezhnev set last October. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets will probably also seek an expression of support from Schmidt for a conference on military detente in Europe. Moscow apparently hopes to secure agreement by the participants in the CSCE review session in Madrid this November to hold such a conference. The Soviets may also try to exploit US-German differences over the need for a Western consensus now in support of a post-Madrid conference. On matters such as these, however, and on other such issues that may arise--East-West cooperation on energy, confidence-building measures to ease military confrontation in Europe--Schmidt will not feel free to make formal bilateral agreements. []

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Bilateral economic relations will be on the agenda, but Schmidt will play down this topic because the Soviets show signs of wanting a ceremonial display of growing economic cooperation--signing a new agreement, for example--presumably for its effect on Washington. The Soviets will nevertheless emphasize their concern about bilateral economic relations. Earlier this year, Moscow appeared to signal that even West German support for an Olympic boycott would be acceptable as long as bilateral trade remained unaffected. The Soviets have indeed proven willing to overlook West Germany's boycott decision in the course of planning Schmidt's visit. []

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Schmidt is obliged to discuss Afghanistan and to report that he expressed condemnation of the Soviet invasion. There is little indication the Soviets will be any more forthcoming on this issue than they were with Giscard. It is unlikely that the staying power of the current Afghan regime--the critical factor in any possible Soviet withdrawal--will look any different at the end of June than it does now. This week, in fact, Brezhnev seemed to be toughening the Soviet position, saying that the deadline for the "beginning" of Soviet withdrawal could be set in conjunction with an Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan settlement guaranteeing the end of outside interference. But he left the conditions for further Soviet withdrawal--much less its completion--even more vague than the recent Afghan proposal. In line with Soviet efforts to suggest greater flexibility on Afghanistan, it is possible that Moscow may make some additional ambiguous noises about withdrawal. []

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Concerned about Iran and wishing to show alliance solidarity, Schmidt will probably request public reaffirmation, at the highest Soviet official level, that holding the US hostages is a violation of international law. He does not expect a positive response to this request. The Soviets may point to Gromyko's ambiguous remarks in Bonn last November as indicative of Moscow's commitment to the inviolability of diplomatic personnel. But it is highly unlikely that Moscow will jeopardize its efforts to court Khomeini by offering anything more than lip service on the hostage issue. The Soviets instead are likely to castigate the US for increasing tension in the Persian Gulf region and advance their own proposal for an international conference safeguarding access to Persian Gulf oil as an alternative to US policy. The Soviets, who have already called Bonn's attention to this latter theme, hope it will have some appeal for the West Germans because of their interest in secure energy supplies. []

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On the Arab-Israeli issue, the Soviets are likely to suggest sympathy for West European concerns about the impasse on the future of the West Bank. Brezhnev this week, for example, expressed Soviet interest in a return to "collective" approaches to the problem. But Moscow is unlikely to use the visit to launch major new initiatives since its primary interest at this time is probably to use the lack of progress to discredit the US approach to peace. []

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Having gone far down the campaign trail as West Germany's "peace candidate" and crisis manager, Schmidt would find it difficult to pull back from the Moscow visit. His last formal visit to Moscow, in 1974, was a difficult encounter and Schmidt probably expects this one to be another strenuous clash of interests. He may still hope that the Soviets will postpone the visit until after the West German election in October. But it has been clear since early May, that Schmidt is facing up to the necessity of the visit. About then, he reached an understanding with Foreign Minister Genscher that they would go to Moscow together and that the visit could not be made to depend on any specific accomplishments. On their return, they will face together the critique of opposition candidate Franz Josef Strauss, who will assure that they deliver a precise accounting. []

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Moscow clearly intends Schmidt's visit to serve as proof that the Soviet concept of differentiated detente is workable and that the USSR can continue to conduct "business as usual" with the West Europeans, without US participation or approval. Moscow may also feel that the visit will retroactively blunt the impact--both inside the USSR and abroad--of Bonn's decision to support the Olympic boycott. Thus while Schmidt may end his visit with little of substance to show for it, the Soviets will regard his trip as a major success simply for having taken place. []

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